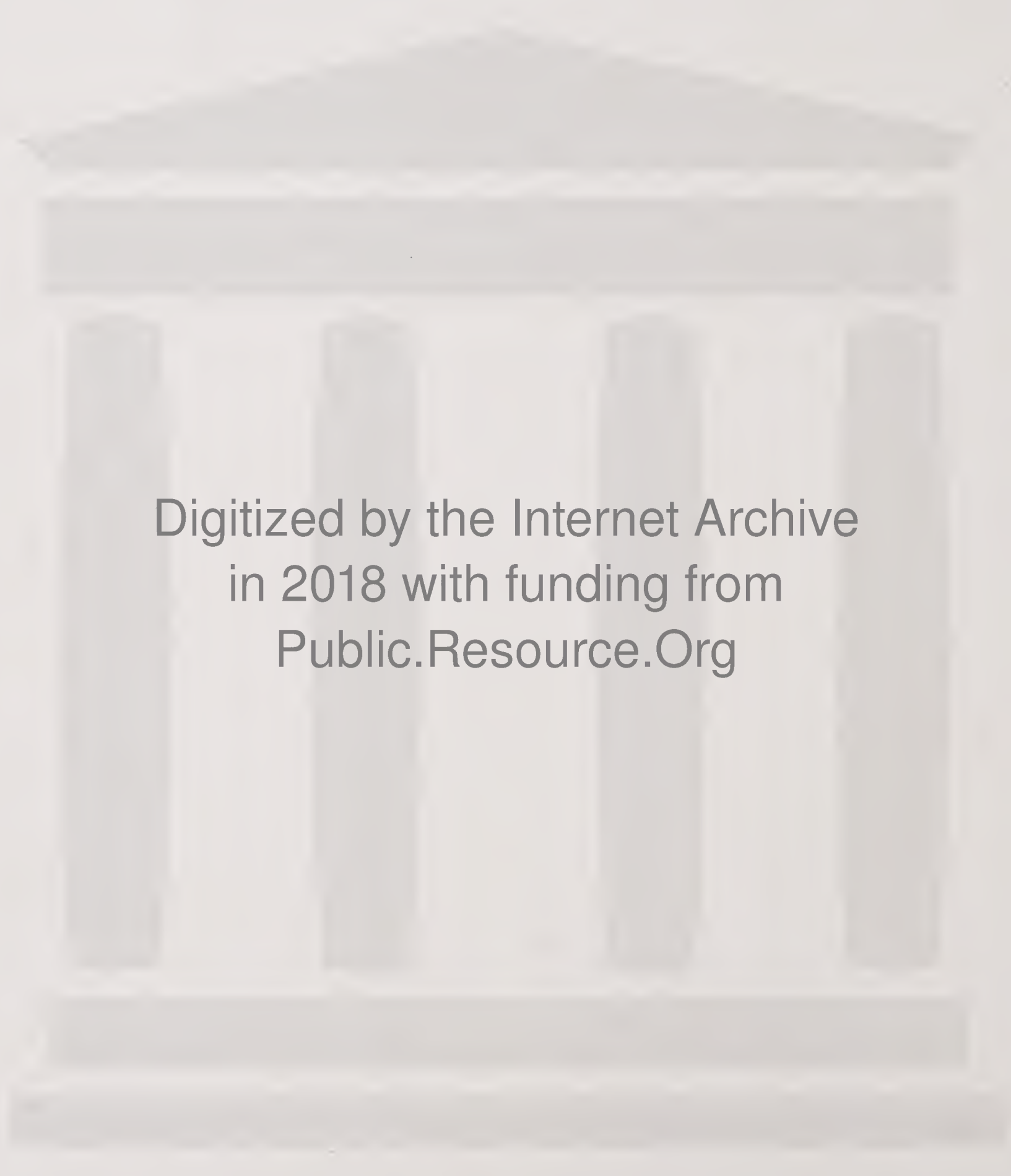




FOLK TALES OF GUJARAT

R.M. BHATT

PUBLICATIONS DIVISION



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PUBLICATIONS DIVISION
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THE MAGIC BALL

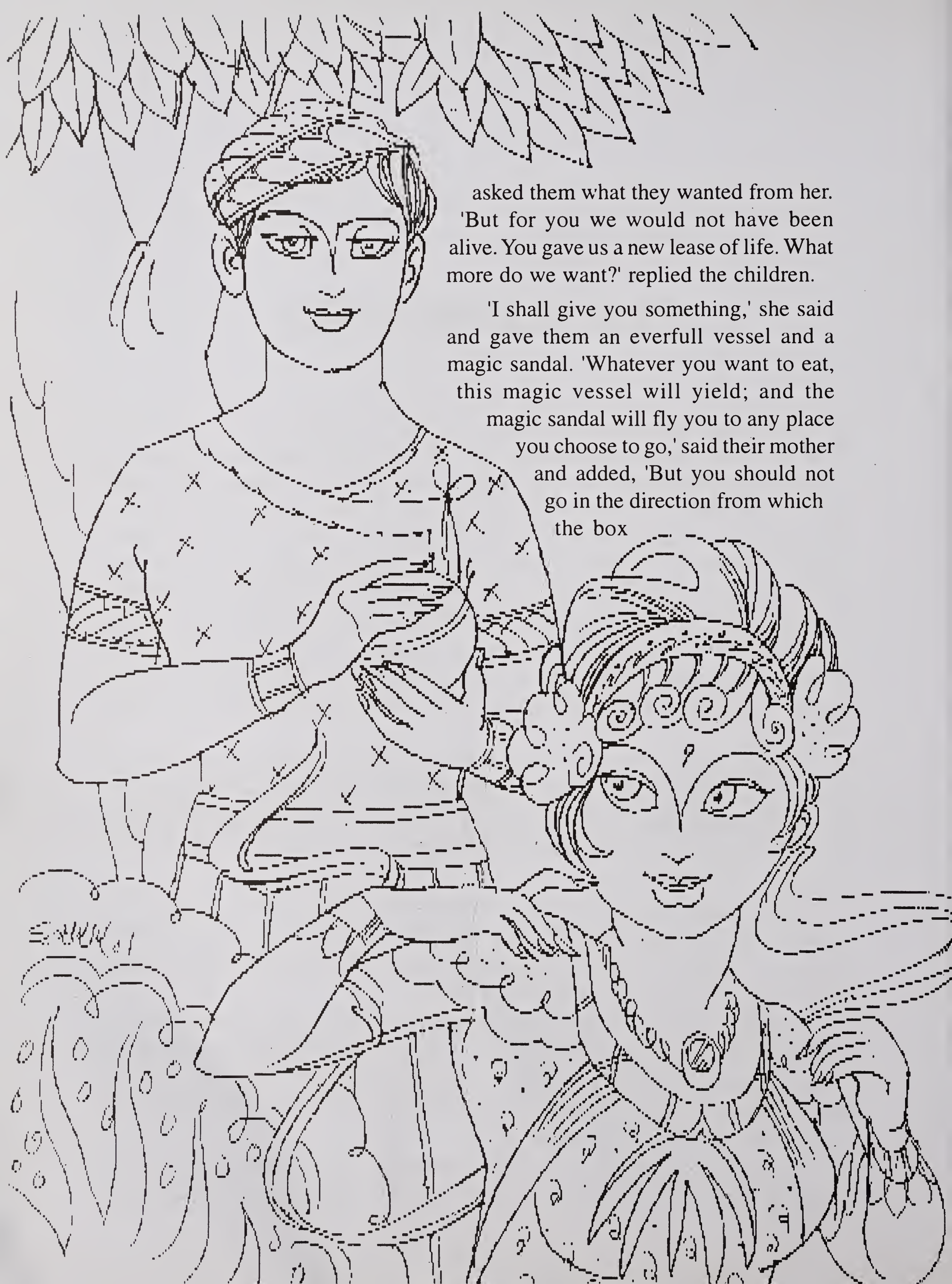
Once upon a time there was a King who had two queens, one of whom was his hot favourite. However, the favourite queen was childless. The queen who was looked down upon by the King was in the family way. When the favourite queen came to know of this, she hatched a plot to do away with the child when it was born. Accordingly, the queen was blindfolded when she was having labour pains and when she gave birth to two beautiful children—a boy and a girl—it was announced that a grass ring and a broomstick were born to her! The favourite queen promised a gold necklace to the midwife if she would kill the two newborns and then inform the King that the disliked queen had given birth to a grass ring and a broomstick. The midwife could not, however, bring herself to kill the innocent children. Instead, she put them in a wooden box and allowed it to float in the sea.

The box reached an island which was inhabited by a mendicant and his wife who had no children. On seeing the box floating nearby, the mendicant's wife persuaded her husband to get the box which he did. When they opened it, they found to their delight two flower-like children. The mendicant couple decided to adopt and bring them up.

Twelve years rolled by. The mendicant fell seriously ill. He said to his children, 'My darlings, my days are numbered. What shall I give you?' 'Father, you have so fondly brought us up and bestowed a new life on us. That is enough. We do not need anything,' replied the children.

'I will give you something,' said the mendicant. And as he handed the children a quilt made of rags and a magic ball, he warned them against going in the direction from which the box came floating. Briefing them about the gifts, the mendicant said, 'Shake off the quilt and gold coins will drop from it. Hurl the ball and it will strike your enemy.'

The mendicant passed away shortly thereafter. His end was peaceful. A couple of days later, the mendicant's wife too fell ill. She called the children and



asked them what they wanted from her.
'But for you we would not have been
alive. You gave us a new lease of life. What
more do we want?' replied the children.

'I shall give you something,' she said
and gave them an everfull vessel and a
magic sandal. 'Whatever you want to eat,
this magic vessel will yield; and the
magic sandal will fly you to any place
you choose to go,' said their mother
and added, 'But you should not
go in the direction from which
the box

came floating near the island.' Saying this, she breathed her last.

Having finished the obsequies, the children, curiously enough, set out in the direction in which they were forbidden to go. The magic sandal dropped the brother and the sister near the outskirts of a village. The two set up their camp there.

One morning the boy began to play with the magic ball, saying. 'May the ball strike my enemy.' And the ball struck the chest of the favourite queen and returned to the boy.

The children shook off the quilt and down poured gold coins. With these they built a palatial house.

The boy played with the ball everyday and it struck the chest of the favourite queen who complained bitterly to the King and asked him to finish off the boy who sent the ball to strike her. The King, however, would not take her seriously.

The queen sent word to the boy's sister through a maid-servant to get her brother married, so that they would have good company.

The sister, therefore, prevailed upon her brother to get married. The brother thereupon set out for a country of snake virgins. When he started playing with his ball, the *nagkanya* (snake-princess) emerged on the scene. On seeing the boy, she said, 'What is it that you want? What brings you here?' 'I want to get married', was the boy's reply. Fascinated by the boy's handsome figure, the *nagkanya* offered to marry him.

The marriage ceremony over, the boy returned home. The brother said to the sister, 'Here is your *bhabhi*' (sister-in-law). Then, as usual, he began to play with his ball. And the ball struck the chest of the queen. This continued for days.

The harassed queen again and again complained to the King who grudgingly said, 'Let us sit together. Let me see who strikes you. In case I see the boy striking you, I will hang him.'

The King and his favourite queen sat together. The boy came out of his house to play with his magic ball. And as he said, 'O my magic ball! Go and strike my enemy,' the ball struck the queen who went somersault.

The King got furious. He ordered his soldiers to handcuff the boy and bring him before him. They went to the boy's house and told him that he was wanted by the King. The boy replied, 'I am not going with you. In case your King needs me badly, let him come to me.'

The reply was conveyed to the King who was perplexed. 'What shall I do? Who is this boy who dares give such a reply?' the King mused.



The next day the King went to the boy alone. He was very warmly received. When asked, the boy began his story, 'Listen to me, O King! Once there was a King. He had two queens.' The King interrupted, 'But where could the queens be?' 'Since you interrupted me, the story will not be told today. It can be resumed only tomorrow.'

The King returned to his palace. The boy resumed his play with the ball which again struck the queen. The King was now more interested in the boy's story than in the queen's complaint. He waited impatiently for the next day to dawn.

The King paid a visit to the boy as the sun rose the next morning. At his request the boy resumed the story. 'Once upon a time, there was a King. He had two queens. One of them was his favourite and the other he did not love.' And as he heard this, he grew suspicious. He said to himself, 'Could it not be about me?' So he asked the boy who the King was and where the queens were.

The boy again said, 'The story will not be told today since you interrupted me. It can be resumed only tomorrow in case you care to hear it.'

Dejected, the King returned home, eagerly waiting for the next morning to come.

At sunrise, the King paid a visit to the boy and urged him to continue the story.

The boy resumed the story: 'Once upon a time, there was a King. He had two queens. One of them was his favourite and the other he disliked. The unloved queen



gave birth to a boy and a girl. It was made known to the King through the midwife that a grass ring and a broomstick were born to the queen.' As he heard this, the King impatiently asked the boy, 'But where could the boy and the girl be?'

The boy stopped and wanted the King to visit him the following day since despite his instructions the King had interrupted him. Abashed and perplexed, the King returned home.

He visited the boy again the next morning. The boy resumed the story, this time taking up the thread from where he had left off. 'The midwife put these children in a box and allowed the box to float in the sea. The floating box came near an island. A mendicant and his wife who lived on it saw it and at the desire of his wife, the mendicant brought it home. The mendicant couple had no children. They brought up the children.' The King's suspicion grew stronger and therefore could not resist the query. 'But where are the children?' The boy refused to tell the story further because the King had interrupted him again.

Disheartened, the King returned to his palace. He gave up food and drink. He was in deep agony.

The boy resumed the story the next day as the King came to him entreating him to tell the story further.

'The mendicant was on his death-bed. He said to his adopted children, 'Darlings! What shall I give you?' Hearing this, the King wept bitterly. He felt these were his own children.

He summoned both the queens. He ordered the midwife to be brought before him immediately. The King threatened to hang her if she indulged in falsehood.

She confessed the guilt. The King threatened his favourite queen with dire consequences if she did not come out with the truth. She also made a confession.

The King was now quite sure that the story narrated by the boy was his own story. With tears rolling down his cheeks, the King hugged the children. He gave his Kingdom to the boy. He proclaimed that the queen who had plotted the murder of the children would be lowered in a pit with her head out of it and the vehicles and passersby would trample over her head and would thus be crushed to death.

The children's mother, after years of separation, was reunited with her children. Her heart was full of joy.

'THERE IS A DIVINITY THAT SHAPES OUR ENDS.'

There lived in a village a woodcutter named Harichand, who cut wood and sold it in a nearby town. This work, however, would not fetch him enough to help him eke out a living. He was feeling despondent day after day.

It so happened one hot summer day that he toiled all daylong cutting wood. With faggots on his head, he went from house to house to sell them, but there was no buyer. And ultimately with great difficulty when he found one, he did not receive enough money for his faggots. But he heaved a sigh at having earned some money at last.

In sheer disgust, he said to his old father, 'Although I work hard, I cannot make ends meet. Is it due to my bad luck or sins committed in my previous birth?'

The father pondered and replied that if that were so he and the village moneylender were born on the same day and under the same stars. 'Have patience and everything will turn out all right in course of time,' advised the father.

On hearing this, Harichand got enraged. With an axe on his shoulder, he rushed to the *bania*'s shop and straightway went to the counter where the portly *bania* sat and, standing before him demanded, 'You must vacate your seat.'

The *bania*, shrewd that he was, took in the situation in a trice. He sensed danger to his life. He saw that the woodcutter seemed to be deeply disturbed and aggrieved and would possibly be in no mood to listen to reason. He, therefore vacated his seat swiftly and said, 'Now, tell me what is the matter with you.'

'My father tells me that you and I were born on the same day and under the same stars. You are lucky, I am not. I toil all day long and undergo severe hardship. Why should I be miserable and you happy? I shall not allow you to



reoccupy your seat,' said Harichand.

Although the *bania* was deprived of his seat, he kept his cool and said, 'You are deprived perfectly right. I shall do as you wish. But listen. Our King was also born on the same day and under the same stars as we are. I am as much fed up with this business as you are with your work. I alone am not to blame.'

'Let us then go to the King. Let us start right now,' said the woodcutter.

The two sought an audience with the King. It was granted because of the moneylender or else who would allow a mere woodcutter to see the King?

The King welcomed them to his court and asked, 'What brings you two here, Sheth? Any complaints to make? Have you any important or secret news to convey? Be frank and tell me everything without any fear.'

'O King, the woodcutter has something more important to say,' said the moneylender.

The King asked the woodcutter to be frank and forthright and without any reservations or fear to speak.

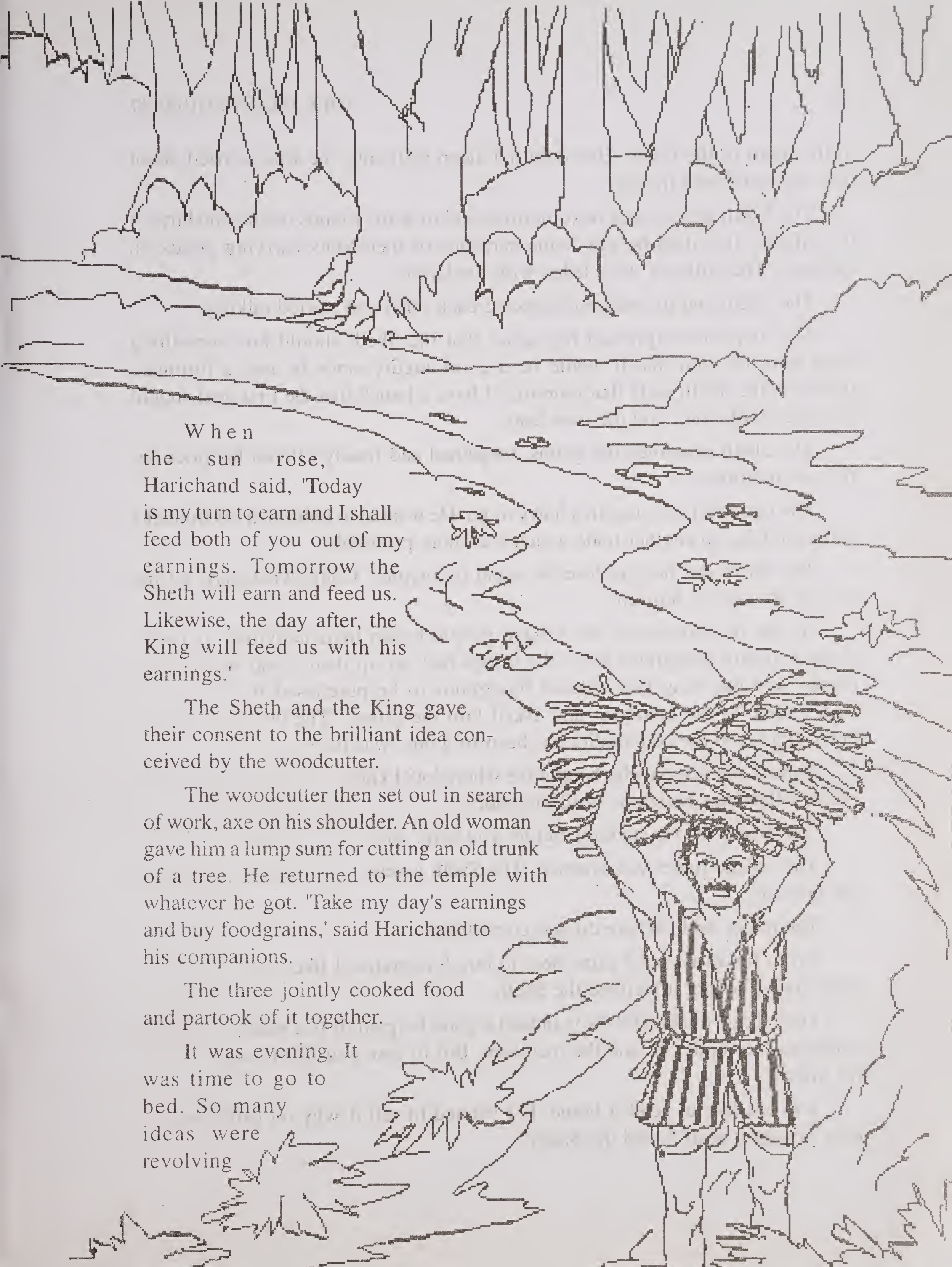
'Pardon me, O King, if I am found guilty of impertinence. Although you, the Sheth and I were born on the same day and under the same stars, I hardly earn enough to keep my body and soul together, while you roll in wealth and prosperity and the Sheth has everything he needs,' said the woodcutter.

'You are certainly right,' said the King, 'but what is it that you want? You will be rid of poverty in case you so desire.'

'That is not my wish,' replied Harichand. 'I have bidden farewell to my house. The Sheth has been divested of his business and now it is your turn. You must give up your kingdom and come with me. I want to probe into the mystery of why it is that things happen the way they do.'

'If that pleases you, I shall do it. You and I think alike. I also want to know why things happen as they do,' said the King.

The King disguised himself and the three set out for an unknown destination. They soon reached a village. They stayed overnight at a temple.



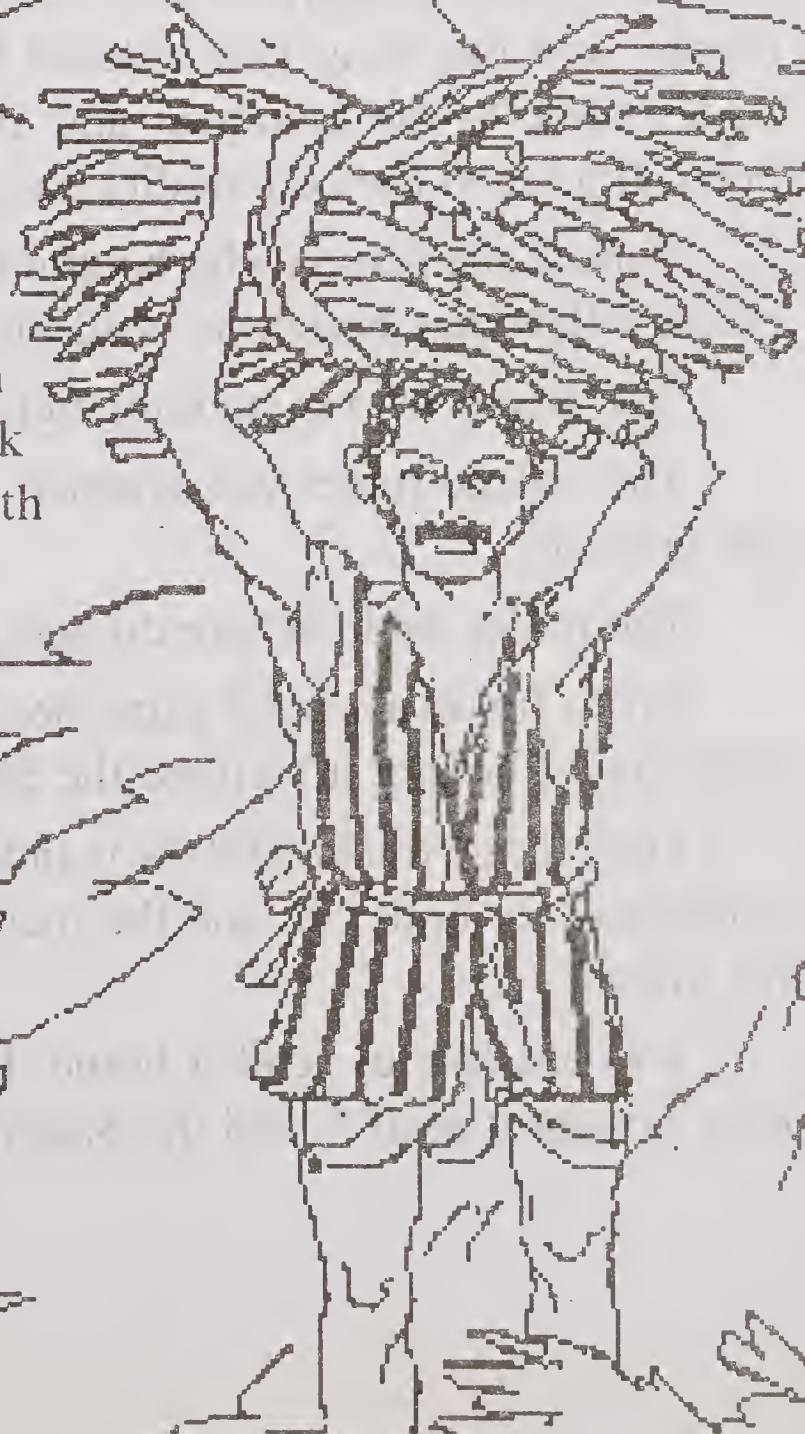
When
the sun rose,
Harichand said, 'Today
is my turn to earn and I shall
feed both of you out of my
earnings. Tomorrow the
Sheth will earn and feed us.
Likewise, the day after, the
King will feed us with his
earnings.'

The Sheth and the King gave
their consent to the brilliant idea con-
ceived by the woodcutter.

The woodcutter then set out in search
of work, axe on his shoulder. An old woman
gave him a lump sum for cutting an old trunk
of a tree. He returned to the temple with
whatever he got. 'Take my day's earnings
and buy foodgrains,' said Harichand to
his companions.

The three jointly cooked food
and partook of it together.

It was evening. It
was time to go to
bed. So many
ideas were
revolving



in the mind of the *bania*. He could not sleep well since he was worried about how he would earn money.

The Sheth got up early next morning and took his rounds on the outskirts of the village. Just then he saw some caravans of merchants carrying goods on bullocks. The bullocks were laden with foodgrains.

The Sheth and the merchant greeted each other and started talking.

The merchant expressed his desire that the Sheth should buy something from him. He said that it would be a good augury since he met a fortunate person in the Sheth early that morning. 'I have a hunch that the first deal should be struck with you,' said the merchant.

The Sheth examined the grains, bargained and finally offered his price for the commodities.

The merchant was also in a hurry to go. He wanted to unburden his bullocks and soon take up another trade which was more profitable.

The Sheth did not disclose his mind to anyone. 'Come what may, let me see,' he thought to himself.

As the day advanced, the village people began their activities. A trader wanted to buy foodgrains since the troops had set up their camp in the town nearby and the King had ordered foodgrains to be purchased for them. The trader came to the merchant and asked him the prices. 'The deal has already been struck and the commodity has been sold out,' was the reply.

'Who is the person who bought the whole lot? I know for certain that no one in the village has bought it,' said the trader.

'The Sheth who is standing before you here,' said the merchant.

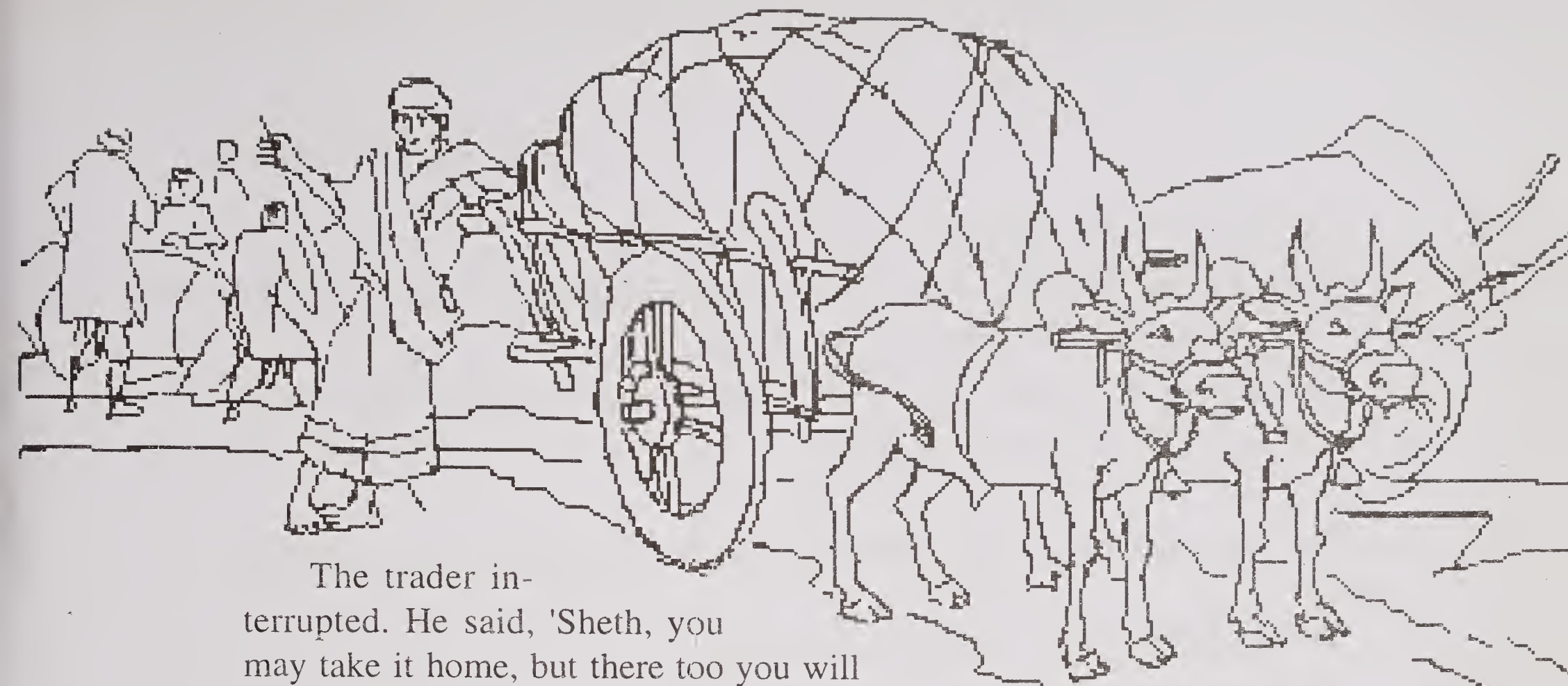
The village trader was stunned. The Sheth greeted the trader who returned the greeting.

The trader said, 'Where do you come from?'

'From far away, but I came here to buy foodgrains. I liked the commodity and hence I bought it,' replied the Sheth.

The village trader said, 'It is indeed a good bargain. It is a matter of mutual agreement for both you and the merchant. But in case you like to sell it, do let me know.'

'I would like to send it home. If I wanted to sell it why on earth would I have bought it at all?' said the Sheth.



The trader interrupted. He said, 'Sheth, you may take it home, but there too you will ultimately sell it to someone. Then why not sell it to me here itself at a profitable price?'

He took the Sheth aside and indicated the price with the fingers.

The Sheth at first declined to sell but ultimately sold it. The caravans were emptied in the village warehouse. The Sheth took his profit and reached the temple.

The woodcutter and the King had just risen from their beds and finished their ablutions. They were awaiting the arrival of the Sheth, who showed up at last.

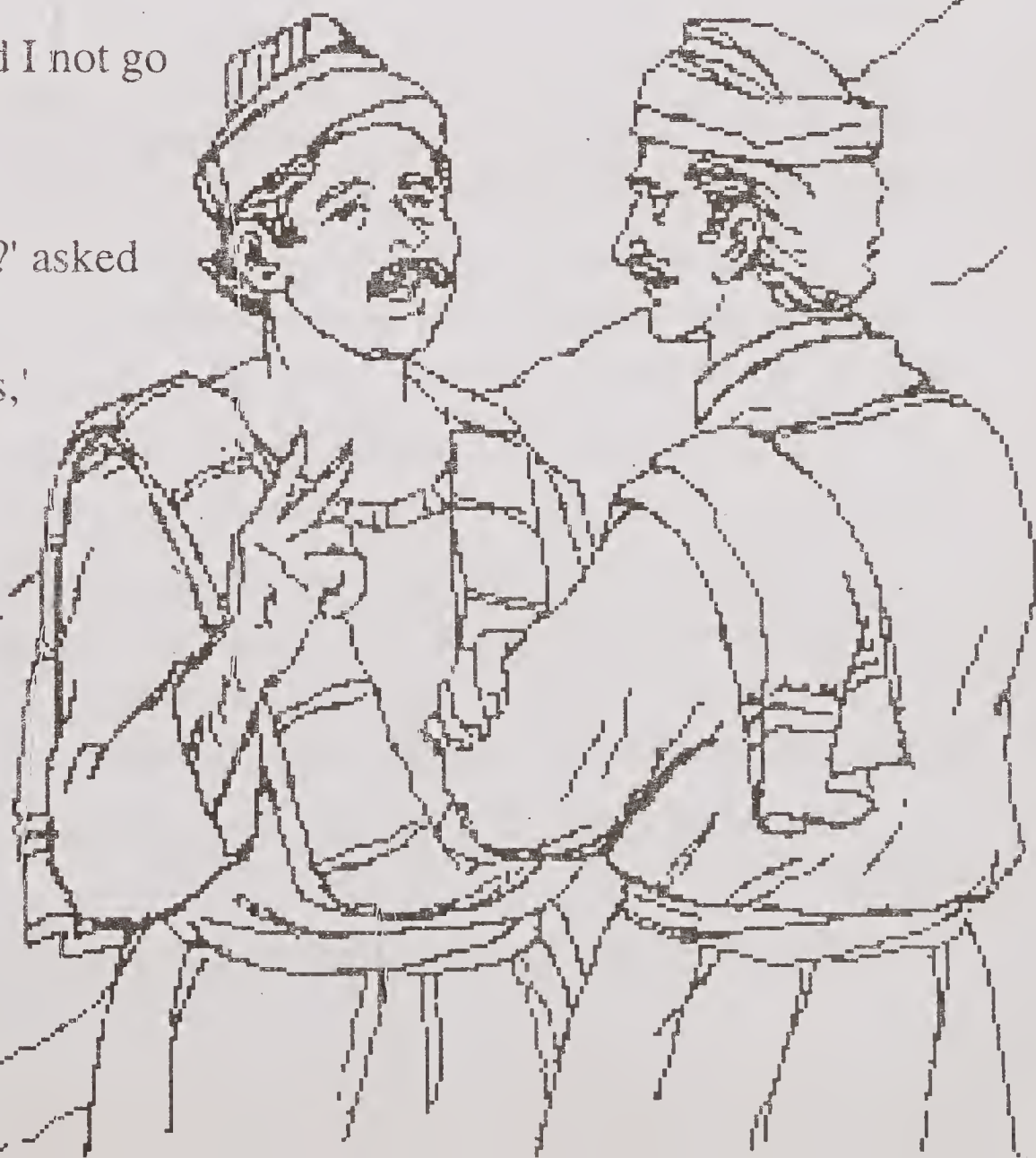
The Sheth said, 'Look, did I not go out alone?'

'Yes,' both of them said.

'Whose turn was it today?' asked he.

'Of course, it was yours,' said both of them.

'Take this then.' So saying, he piled his money in a heap.



The King and the woodcutter were flabbergasted.

'How is it that he earned such a lot of money by taking a round in the village and without much effort?' they both wondered.

'You may cook whatever you wish. 'Take my day's earnings. Has anything been left for me to do?' asked the Sheth.

'No, your work is over,' said the woodcutter.

The three had a nice time. They spent the whole day in eating and merri-ment.

As evening fell, they returned to the temple.

At night, while the woodcutter and the Sheth were asleep, the King still lay awake. He said to himself, 'The woodcutter laboured hard and earned something, the Sheth showed his ingenuity in commerce. Tomorrow is my turn to show my worth. But it does not matter. Let me see. In fact, we have set out to fathom the logic behind why things happen the way they do.' As he was engrossed in such thoughts, he fell fast asleep.

The King rose early from his bed and, leaving his two companions in deep slumber set out for the town. However, he found its gates closed. So he sat outside on a wooden platform by the roadside.

It so happened that the King of the town had died suddenly in the night. He had no son. Nor had he any heir to succeed him on the throne. The queen, the minister and the state officials thought that appointing an heir from among the noble family would give rise to strife and quarrels. So the best way was to make some unknown person the King.

As was customary, the throne should not be kept vacant and the new King should be appointed in the morning. The royal astrologer said, 'Whosoever enters the town on the opening of the gates should be crowned King.'

The gates were duly opened in the morning in the presence of the minister, the priest and the other leading personages of the town.

As soon as the gates opened, the King who was waiting at the gates proceeded to enter the town and to his great astonishment and pleasant surprise, he was garlanded. The Brahmin applied *tilak* to his forehead. The arrival of the King was heralded by the royal trumpeters.

'But what is all this about? What is the auspicious occasion?' asked the King.

'You are the King. May you live a hundred years,' said the minister.

The anointing ceremony over, the funeral procession of the deceased King left for the royal cremation ground.

The King took over the reins of government, gave away prizes and gifts and honours to mark his accession to the throne.

The woodcutter and the Sheth came to know about the good luck of the King.

The King sent invitation to them to have lunch with him.

The lunch over, the King asked the woodcutter, 'Do you now comprehend?'

'Yes', said the woodcutter.

'What?'

'Whatever God wills, happens.'

The King employed the woodcutter and gave him a house to live in and some land to till.

MENA GURJARI

Mena, a Gurjar woman of surpassing beauty who hailed from Gadh Mandav, was happily married to Chandio, Chief of a warrior tribe of shepherds. After marriage she was ceremoniously taken to Gadh Gokul, her husband's home, escorted by her husband's younger brother, Hirio, for whom she had a special fondness. Mena was accorded a warm welcome by her in-laws.

One fine morning when Mena went to the village well to fetch water along with her companions, news reached there that the Crown Prince of the Emperor of Delhi had set up his camp in a village nearby. This aroused curiosity among them and they felt like visiting the camp. They were desirous of seeing the pomp and splendour of the court. Mena pleaded with her in-laws to give her permission to go with her companions to have a look at the Moghul camp. Her mother-in-law, however, warned her against going.

'If you go there you will be in trouble. The Prince, who is known to be lecherous and notorious for his bacchanalian adventures will possibly kidnap you to his palace. He will outrage your modesty and you will suffer untold indignities at his hands. And, on top of it, you will get the stigma of shame.'

But when Mena showed utter unconcern, her mother-in-law remonstrated with her, saying she wanted to become the queen and therefore wished to visit the Moghul camp.

Heedless alike of advice and even remonstrances, Mena said, 'I must visit the camp. God will protect my honour.'

Clad in a fine variegated attire, a necklace of pearls round her neck, rings on all the ten fingers, anklets jingling, she set out for the royal camp.

As she was trekking with four red pots of curd and milk placed one above the other on her head, every eye was fixed on her, so bewitching was her beauty, so captivating her charm, so attractive her gait, so fascinating her mien!

The Crown Prince came to know that a curd-seller of uncommon beauty

was selling curds and milk in the camp. He, therefore, went out to see her. No sooner did he see her than he was struck by her bewitching beauty and charm. He was, in fact, infatuated with her.

'O you paragon of beauty!' accosted the Prince, 'why are you roving in the streets? Come to my harem, wear a veil over your face and enjoy all the pleasures of life.'

'What the hell do I care for your palace and wealth? I am happy to wander about. What have I got to do with you? I would set your curtain on fire,' replied Mena boldly.

'Vile woman! How dare you reply like this to the emperor? But listen to me, O Gurjar woman! Why do you wear ornaments made of tinsel? Wear a gold chain, O fair one!' coaxed the Prince.

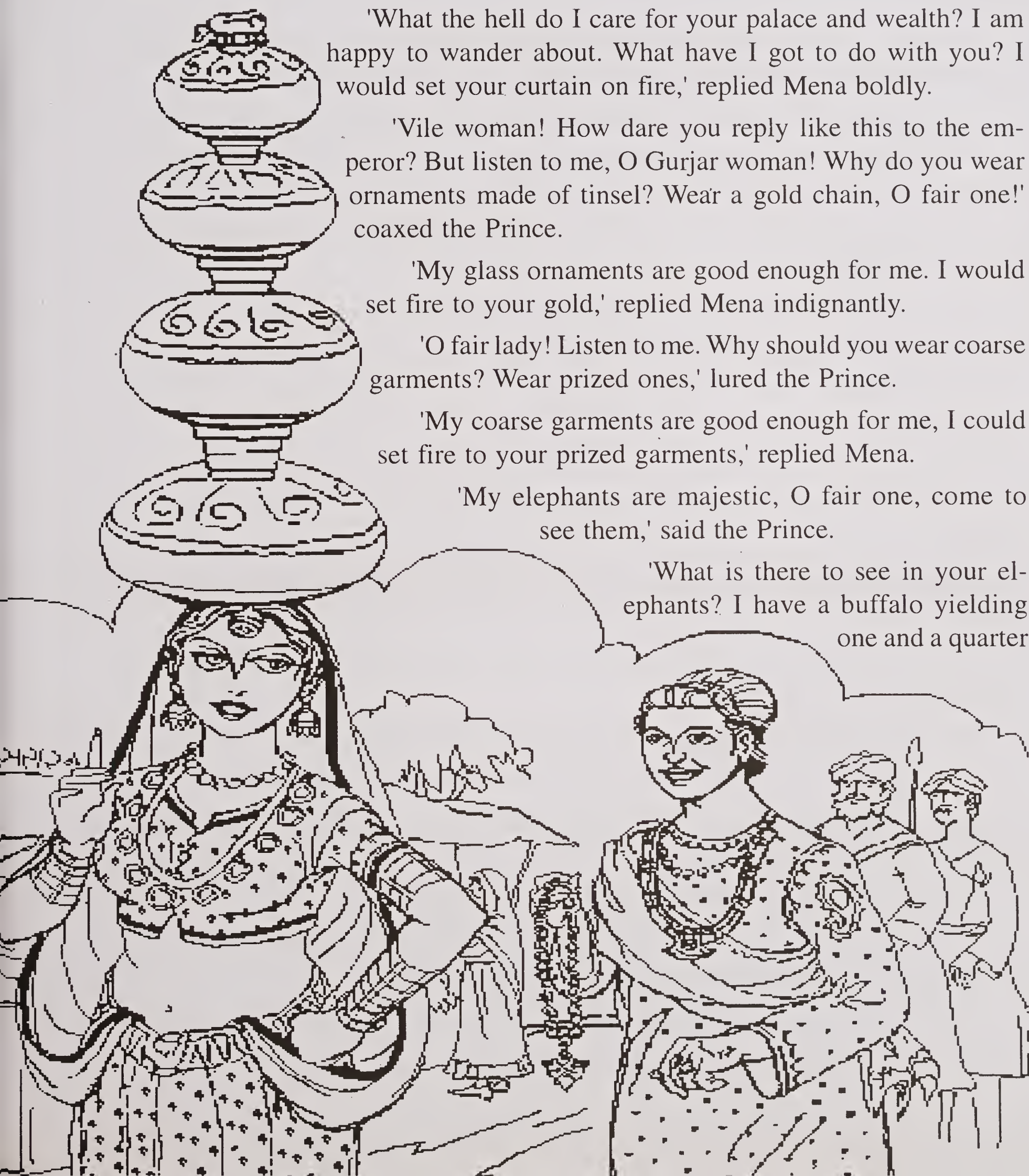
'My glass ornaments are good enough for me. I would set fire to your gold,' replied Mena indignantly.

'O fair lady! Listen to me. Why should you wear coarse garments? Wear prized ones,' lured the Prince.

'My coarse garments are good enough for me, I could set fire to your prized garments,' replied Mena.

'My elephants are majestic, O fair one, come to see them,' said the Prince.

'What is there to see in your elephants? I have a buffalo yielding one and a quarter



maunds of milk. She is better than your elephant,' replied Mena.

'My princes are handsome. Come and see them,' enticed the Prince.

'What is there to see in you princes? My cowherd is much better,' rebuffed Mena.

'My sixteen hundred queens are very beautiful. Come and see them,' said the Prince.

'What is there to see in your queens? My maid-servant who fetches water for us is much better looking,' replied Mena.

'My horses are wonderful, O fair one, come to see them,' said the Prince.

'What is there to see in you horses? My cow at home is much better,' replied Mena.

'See my moustache, how wonderful it is! You should be captivated by it,' boasted the Prince.

'What is there to see in it? It is like my goat's tail,' replied Mena.

'Where is your in-law's house? Which man's wife are you?' asked the Prince.

'Gadh Gokul is my in-law's place and I am the wife of Chandio,' replied Mena.

'Which country's cowherd are you? What is your name?' asked the Prince.

'I am a cowherd from Gadh Mandav and Mena Gurjari is my name,' she replied.

All the lure and temptations offered by the Prince were thus spurned by Mena.

Turning to the pots of curd and milk, the Prince said, 'Tell me the price of that small pot, O fair one!'

'If I tell you the price of the small pot, you will lose your senses,' was the reply.

'Tell me the price of the second pot, O fair one,' asked the Prince.

'If I tell you the price of the second one, you will stake all your sixteen hundred queens,' replied she.

'Tell me the price of the third pot,' said the Prince.

'If I tell you the price, you will forfeit your elephants,' replied Mena.

'Tell me the price of the fourth pot,' said the Prince.

'If I tell you the price of the fourth pot, the whole of your Delhi will be ruined,' replied Mena.

'Who gave this heavenly beauty? You are like a statuette made by a goldsmith,' said the Prince.

'God endowed me with beauty and Providence bestowed fortune on me,' said she.

'What are you babbling, O fair one? I would slap you,' threatened the Prince.

'Don't think I am alone. My nine lakh Gurjars will invade your kingdom,' replied Mena.

'O, vile woman, how dare you give such a reply to the Prince?' demanded the Prince.

'Listen, O Prince, listen to me. I shall slap you and your turban will go flying in the air and your face will turn red. I will have your ponies, your camels, your shields and swords sold for a penny,' rebutted Mena.

Mena was relentless. No power on earth could swerve her from her path of chastity.

Having failed in his attempts to seduce her, the Prince was enraged. He kidnapped her and ordered that the Gurjars be put in chains. Mena was taken captive in the camp.

Mena shed bitter tears, now she was repentant. She recalled what her mother-in-law had told her before she set out to see the camp. She did not lose courage. She was made of sterner stuff. She prayed to God for succour in her hour of trial.

A Brahmin cook who was also taken prisoner along with the Gurjars by the Prince secretly met her. Through the cook Mena sent a letter to her husband's brother, Hirio, entreating him to come and rescue her.

As soon as Hirio heard about the calamity that had befallen Mena, he was livid with rage.

The trumpets blared. The Gurjars were called upon to get ready to fight. Hirio led an army of nine lakh Gurjars against the Prince.

A battle royal took place between the two armies. Hirio and Chandio fought valiantly and defeated the Prince. Mena was rescued by the chivalrous Gurjars.

On return, Mena was refused a place in the family by her mother-in-law and sister-in-law, because she had lived in the harem of the Crown Prince.

Pure and chaste, Mena rises in righteous indignation and ascends to divinity. Legend has it that she left the place and went to Pavagadh where she vanished and later came to be known as Mahakali.

THE MYSTERY OF THE *JALADHARI*

Long, long ago, there lived a King who was a great devotee of Lord Siva. As he was musing how best to propitiate the deity, he hit upon the idea of filling the *jaladhari** with milk and thereby earning His grace and blessing.

They were hot days, long days of summer. Shortly the monsoon broke out. It was the first Monday of the month of Sravana. The King sent forth his messengers into town to proclaim by beat of drum: 'Hear you, inhabitants of the town! Today is the first Monday of Sravana and therefore Siva's *jaladhari* is to be filled to the brim with milk. So pour all your milk into it. Do not give milk even to your children or the aged or the infirm. Milk should be withheld from the calves, too. And see that the *jaladhari* is quickly filled to overflowing. All this for propitiating Lord Siva, the great bestower of bliss, joy and happiness on all of us.

As the King's message began to reach the townsfolk, the people started going to the temple to pour their share of milk into the *jaladhari*. The children cried in vain for milk, the aged and the diseased wilted as they failed to receive their usual glass of daily milk. There was not a drop of milk in any household. Everyone took his milk as his offering to be poured into Siva's *jaladhari* in accordance with the royal behest. But the most amazing thing was, that despite so much milk having been poured into it, the *jaladhari* did not overflow!

The people who had gathered in the temple precincts openly voiced their astonishment why it was so. 'How is it that the *jaladhari* is still short of milk, though nearly everyone in town has poured his milk into it? Why is that so? Have we committed some sin unknown to us? What will the King think of us all?' they lamented.

* A vessel with a perforation at its bottom hang over the phallic symbol of Siva.

More and more people came and emptied their vessels filled with milk into the *jaladhari* in the fond hope of making it overflow. Some went near the sacred vessel and peeped into it: no matter how much milk was poured into it, the vessel was ever unfilled; the level of milk had yet to reach even its mouth!

The phenomenon intrigued them. They discussed the strange happening and wondered how it could be so. The morning wore on and soon it was mid-day.

Just then a pious old woman came there to make her offering of milk. For, she too had heard the King's command to spare every drop of milk for Lord Siva's *jaladhari*, depriving children and the old of their daily quota of milk.

She, however, was a staunch devotee of Lord Siva and a firm believer in His infinite mercy and kindness. She thought to herself: 'The Lord is our divine protector. How will he tolerate it if our children go without milk? He will be hurt if the aged and the infirm are starved of their daily milk.'

She, therefore, fed her children with milk and gave some to the old people in the family. She fed the calves, she gave fodder to the cows and buffaloes. Everyone in her household was fed and felt satisfied and quite happy.

Thereafter she set out for Siva's temple, taking with her some sacred rice,



sandalwood paste, flowers, three *bili* leaves and a bowl containing milk. Reaching the temple, she offered *puja* with great devotion and implicit faith and prayed fervently to the Lord. 'Victory to Bholanath! The King has decreed that the *jaladhari* should not only be filled but must overflow with milk. And yet it is not full. How will my little bowl of milk help it? I really do not know.' After emptying her bowl into the *jaladhari* the woman went away, lost in the timeless ecstasy of strange consummation.

But no sooner had the old devotee walked down the steps of the temple then miracle of miracles- the *jaladhari* began to overflow! The unbelieving temple priest was witness to the phenomenon. Instantly he sent word to the King to come and see the wonder for himself. The King went into ecstasy seeing the *jaladhari* overflowing in a triumph of human faith.

There was a sense of mystery, surprise and disbelief writ large on the faces of many devotees. None of them could explain how it all happened. An old devotee said, 'It was the doing only of God!'

Then came the second Monday of Sravana. The King had his earlier announcement broadcast by beat of drum throughout his capital. All his subjects dutifully went to the temple and poured their milk into the *jaladhari*. Nevertheless, it never filled up fully.

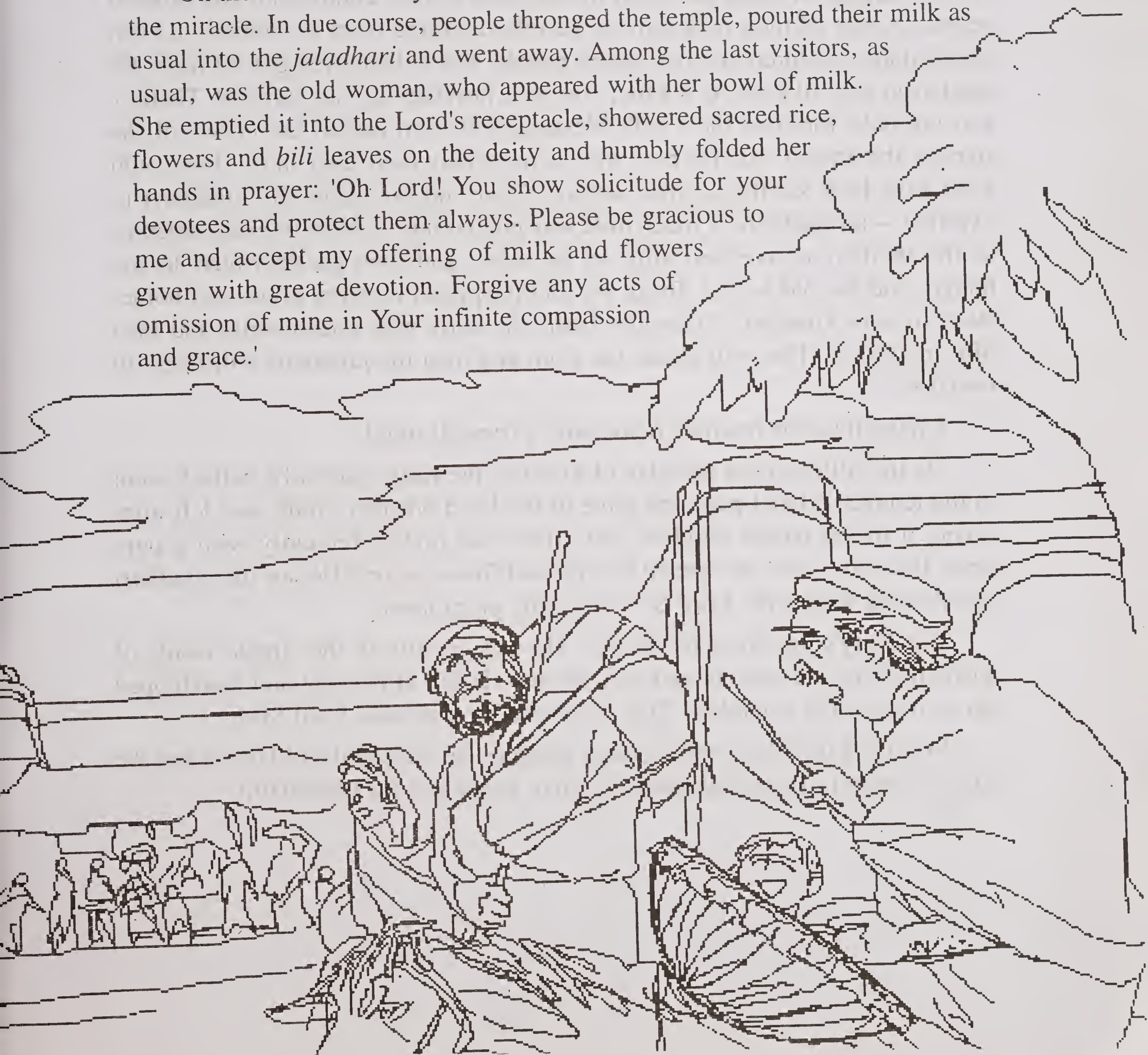
Intrigued and annoyed, the King set his guards and plain clothes men to keep a continuous vigil on all those who came to pour their milk. At last the



same old woman arrived, emptied her bowl of milk into the *jaladhari*, prayed and departed. As she was leaving the last steps of the temple, the *jaladhari* began to overflow. They all tried to find out how the miracle had taken place, but they found no clue.

Days rolled on. The third Sravana Monday dawned, the same wonder took place and by nightfall the devotees were nowhere nearer a solution to the mystery.

On the fourth Monday of Sravana the King decided to go himself and watch the miracle. In due course, people thronged the temple, poured their milk as usual into the *jaladhari* and went away. Among the last visitors, as usual, was the old woman, who appeared with her bowl of milk. She emptied it into the Lord's receptacle, showered sacred rice, flowers and *bili* leaves on the deity and humbly folded her hands in prayer: 'Oh Lord! You show solicitude for your devotees and protect them always. Please be gracious to me and accept my offering of milk and flowers given with great devotion. Forgive any acts of omission of mine in Your infinite compassion and grace.'



Her prayer over, she turned her face and came down the steps. At that very moment the miracle repeated itself – the *jaladhari* began to overflow!

Seeing this, the King held her hand. The poor woman trembled like an aspen leaf, was frightened and there were tears in her eyes.

'Do not fear me, my good woman. Resolve my mental agony. Tell me, how and why the *jaladhari* overflowed. I shall not harm you.'

Joining her hands, the old woman replied: 'Oh King! Forgive me for what I shall be saying. Without sufficient thought and in your enthusiasm you ordered people to pour all their milk into the *jaladhari*, asking them to withhold it even from infants, children and old infirm people. Even the calves got no milk. Of what avail was all this? As a King, you are a provider to your subjects. Thereby you not only forfeited the Lord's blessings but even earned the curses of the starved, the orphans and the poor who were without their daily milk. How could Lord Siva look kindly on your action? So he did not allow the *jaladhari* to overflow – no matter how much milk was poured into it. Now to make amends, let the children receive their milk, let the calves and cows get their feed, let the hungry and the old be fed. Bring joy and happiness to every home and homestead in your kingdom. Thereafter bathe the deity with panchamrita and then offer milk to it. That will please the Lord and then the *jaladhari* will begin to overflow.'

Saying this, she returned home with a tranquil mind.

On the fifth and last Monday of Sravana, the King rose early, bathed, went to the temple, offered *puja* and gave to the Lord whatever milk was left after giving it to the palace children and others and prayed fervently with a pure heart. His prayer over, he opened his eyes and God-a-mercy! He saw the *jaladhari* overflowing with milk. Lord Siva was truly propitiated.

The King's joy knew no bounds. He was grateful to the simple words of wisdom of the old woman and sent for her. He fell at her feet and worshipped her as if she were a goddess. That, too, must have pleased Lord Siva.

May the Lord bless every created being as He blessed the old dame and the King! Victory to Lord Mahadeva! Jai Siva Shankara! Jai Bholanath!

AN INNOCENT GIRL

There lived in a small town a rich merchant who was held in high esteem by the local people. He had three sons, all married, and a little daughter named Savitri.

When the merchant grew old, he wished to go on a pilgrimage with his wife. He expressed his desire to his sons and asked them to take care of their little sister while they were away.

A few days after the merchant and his wife had set out on their pilgrimage, their daughters-in-law concocted secret plans to harass the little girl, whom they did not like.

One day, one of them said to the girl, 'Savitri, take this earthen pot and rope and fetch water from the well.' With the pot on her head and the rope on her shoulder, Savitri started for the well. She tied the rope to the pot and let it down into the well. To her dismay, however, the rope was too short. She was non-plussed. She began to cry because she had been threatened with punishment if she did not fetch water in time.

A snake, who was living in a hole nearby, came out and said, 'Do not get frightened, my child, tell me why you are crying.' Savitri said, 'I must take water for my home but my brother's wife has given me a rope which is too short. In case there is any delay in returning home with the water she will spank me.'

The snake took pity on her and said, 'Don't worry. Tie me to the rope and see if that helps you.' She did so and found that the rope was of sufficient length. She, however, soon found that there was a hole in the pot. By the time the pot came to the top of the well, half the water had leaked out.

Savitri again began to cry and told the snake of her plight. A frog who heard the conversation between the girl and the snake came hopping and said, 'I shall sit in the pot and plug the hole with my body.'

This clicked. The girl thanked the snake and the frog and returned home

happily with the pot full of water. The frog jumped out of the pot quickly, unnoticed by her sisters-in-law.

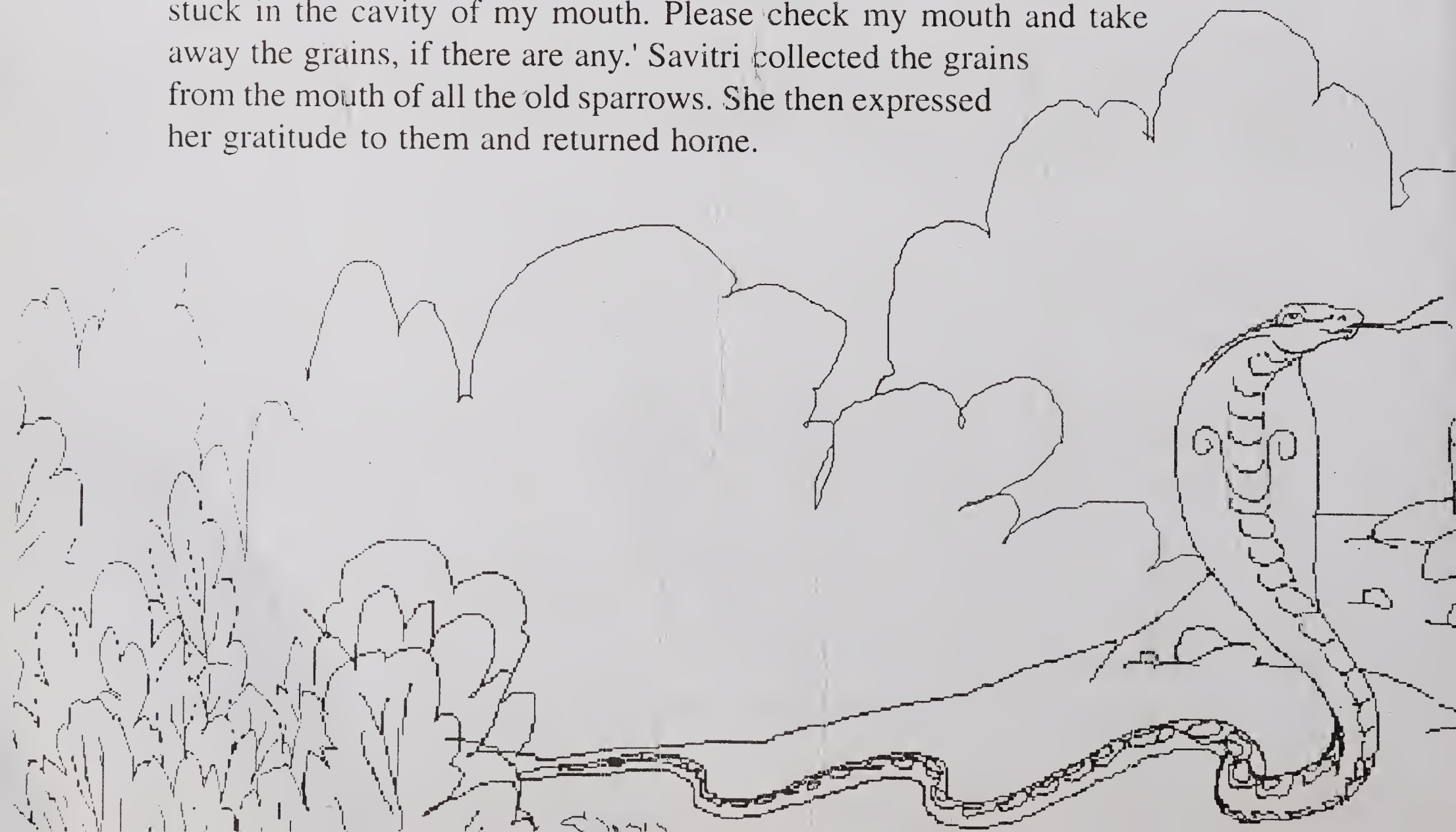
The women at home wondered how she had brought water in spite of the fact that she had been knowingly given a short rope and a leaking pot.

The second brother's wife thought of some other way of ill-treating the poor little girl.

She gave her a basket full of paddy and said, 'Sit on that platform and remove the husk.' She tried hard to do so but did not succeed. She was again perplexed and she began to cry, 'Who will help me this time?' On seeing her in distress, a sparrow flew down and offered to help. She called a number of her friends and they together separated the husk in no time.

The girl took the rice and the husk home. Her brother's wife who had assigned the task to her weighed the rice and the husk and said, 'The rice and the husk together should weigh more. You are careless, go and see if you have inadvertently left some rice there.' Savitri returned to the spot and began to search if any rice had been left there. She found none and so she began to moan. All the sparrows came rushing to her. Said the girl, 'My brother's wife complains that the rice and the husk should weigh more.'

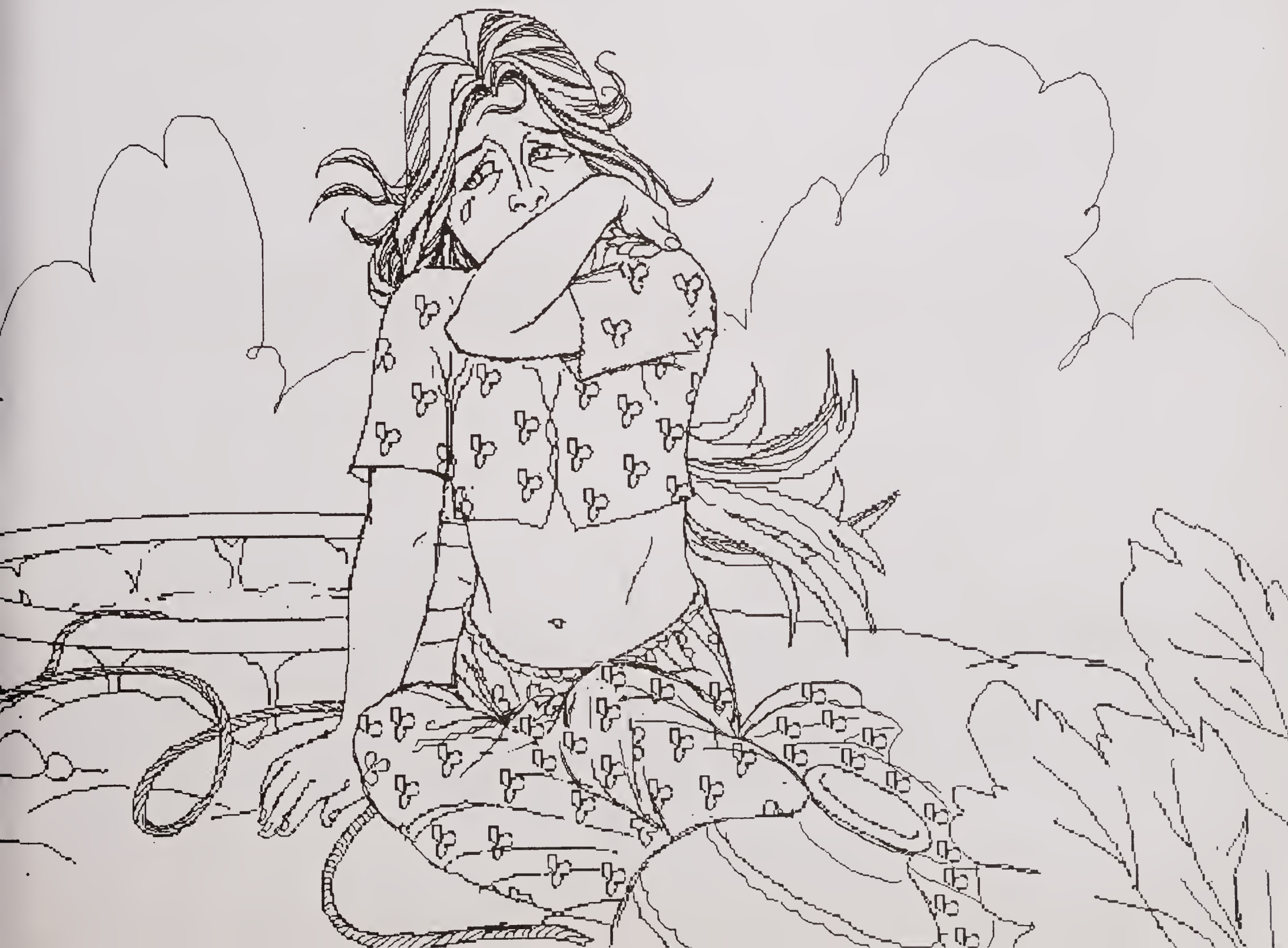
Meanwhile, a sparrow, old in age, came forward and said, 'Wait. I shall open my beak. When I was removing the husk, some rice may have stuck in the cavity of my mouth. Please check my mouth and take away the grains, if there are any.' Savitri collected the grains from the mouth of all the old sparrows. She then expressed her gratitude to them and returned home.



A few days after, the third brother's wife asked Savitri to wash clothes. A bucket full of dirty clothes was given to her with instructions to wash them snow-white – as white as the wings of a crane. She was, however, not given any washing soap. Taking the bucket of dirty clothes on her head, Savitri reached the village pond and tried to remove the dirt. With tears in her eyes, she recalled what her brother's wife had ordered her to do. She would receive a beating in case she failed to comply with the instructions given to her. And then she began to cry.

A crane who was sporting in the pond heard the girl's moans and flew to her. When asked, Savitri poured out to him her tale of woe. The crane said, 'You want to wash clothes white – as white as my wings, is it not? Well, it shall be done.'

'Spread these clothes and watch what I do.' The crane rolled on the clothes and with the magic touch of his wings, the clothes miraculously turned snow-white. The girl was wonderstruck and returned home happily.



Five years rolled by. The girl had grown up. Her parents returned from their pilgrimage. Her neighbours reported to them how Savitri had been ill-treated by her sisters-in-law. The girl however, had not uttered a single word of complaint against them. Nor had she complained to the brothers any time before.

The parents were unhappy, but did not take their daughters-in-law to task. When the brothers heard this, they hung their heads in shame. They admonished their wives. They offered sincere apologies to the parents for the neglect and indifference they had shown to their sister. Their wives said, 'We were ignorant. We deeply regret our misdeeds. Please forgive us for our unseemly behaviour.'

Savitri was married off to a boy of a cultured family. She lived happily ever after.



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GOOD IS GOOD, EVIL IS EVIL

There lived in a village a Brahmin who was very poor. He was illiterate too and eked out a living by begging. Every morning he went from house to house, seeking alms and returned home with some flour which people gave him out of compassion. He had four children whom he was not able to support. Not satisfied with his lot, one day his wife said to him, 'What you get by way of alms is not enough for the six of us. We are half-starved. You ought to find out some other means of earning your livelihood.'

'I know that our condition is very bad. We live from hand to mouth. We cannot afford to have even two square meals a day. But tell me what I should do,' sighed the Brahmin.

'Go to the King. He is very kind. He will be pleased to give something,' replied his wife.

'But when I seek alms, what shall I say? How shall I bless him?' asked the Brahmin.

'Say whatever occurs to you at that time,' advised his wife.

The next morning the Brahmin went to the King who welcomed him.

'What shall I give you?' asked the King.

'Whatever you please Sir, I am very poor,' replied the Brahmin and added, 'O King, good is good and bad is bad.'

The King was pleased and gave him a note which said that its bearer may be given a rupee.

The Brahmin presented the note to the cashier who gave him a rupee. Thus the Brahmin went to the King every day, blessed him and got a rupee.

An attendant who pressed the King's legs happened to see the Brahmin come to the King and receive a note from him. He did not like the Brahmin getting a rupee every day for nothing.

One day when the Brahmin was returning home from the King, the attendant stopped him and said, 'You come here every day, say something to the King and receive a note. But what about my bakshish?'

The Brahmin did not, however, pay heed to what the attendant said and went away.

The next morning when the Brahmin was returning from the King's palace, the attendant again stopped him and said, 'The King was annoyed with you yesterday. I thought I should tell you.'

The Brahmin became nervous. He said, 'I have not given the King any cause for displeasure. Please tell me what happened.'

Said the attendant, 'The King was telling me that this Brahmin comes near me and utters blessings but when he speaks, his mouth is giving out foul smell.'

'I will put a piece of cloth on my mouth and nose; when I go near him to bless him,' said the Brahmin and added, 'It is kind of you to have told me this. If the King is displeased, he may stop giving me the note.'

The next morning the Brahmin went to the King with a piece of cloth on his nose and mouth, blessed him and left with his usual note.

In the evening when he was pressing the King's legs, the attendant said, 'Your majesty! The Brahmin who comes to you every morning is arrogant,' but before he proceeded to say anything more, the King cut him short and said, 'He is not. He seems to me to be very mild, humble and docile.'

'But, Your Majesty, did you see that he was putting a piece of cloth on his nose and mouth?' queried the attendant.

'Yes. So what? May be, he had some trouble. Perhaps his tooth was aching,' said the King.

'No, Sir, nothing of the kind. He himself told me that the King's ear was stinking and therefore he had to cover his nose and mouth with a piece of cloth in order to ward off the foul smell,' said the attendant.

Next morning the Brahmin came as usual and as he was returning with a note from the King, the attendant stopped him and said, 'But you did not give me any bakshish.'

The Brahmin was reluctant to lose his rupee but said, 'All right, take the note which the King has given me. I shall forego my rupee today.'

And the Brahmin handed the note to the attendant, who was pleased to receive it.



The attendant went to the cashier and presented the note to him. The cashier read it and said, 'Please wait here.'

The attendant did so. Then the cashier sent for a barber and said to him, 'Cut off the nose and ears of this attendant. These are the orders of the King!'

The King's orders contained in the note were promptly executed.

With blood dripping from his nose and ears, the attendant rushed to the King.

'How did you receive the note I had given to the Brahmin?' asked the King, being surprised to see blood oozing out from his nose and ears. 'Sir, I asked the Brahmin to give me bakshish. And he gave me the note.'

'You lied to the Brahmin. That is the sin you committed for which you have to pay dearly.'

This is a collection of folk tales from Gujarat. They beautifully sketch the value system of society and depict tradition. They underline the permanence of the message they preach in these time when the traditional value system is fast crumbling.



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